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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000975

SIPDIS

NOFORN

STATE FOR S/CT KATY GORE AND DS/IP/AF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/13

TAGS: PTER ASEC FAIR PGOV NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NO SIGN OF MISSING 727

REF: STATE 143140

CLASSIFIED BY POL/C BRIAN BROWNE. REASONS: 1.5 (B, D & G).

¶11. (S/NF) SUMMARY: In response to Reftel, Mission officers visited four Nigerian airports June 1 and did not see the missing 727 aircraft. It is unlikely the aircraft could have landed in Nigeria without drawing considerable GOM attention. Since the disappearance of the aircraft, DATT has remained in contact with the Nigerian Defense Intelligence Agency (NDIA) and senior Nigerian officials. Nigeria-based IRS Airlines Chairman Rabiu Isyaku Rabiu, informed Ambassador Jeter that Aerospace Sales and Leasing of Jacksonville, FL, owned the missing aircraft, tail number N844AA and that the principal of Aerospace was Maury Joseph. Rabiu told the Ambassador that Joseph was probably in South Africa, and his telephone number was 27-73-315-10565. Rabiu, whose IRS Airlines' colors are similar to the silver/white fuselage and blue and white stripe of the aircraft, offered to show Post any documents regarding prior ownership of aircraft in the IRS fleet. END SUMMARY.

MISSION VISITS FOUR AIRPORTS

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¶12. (C) The Mission sent officers to Abuja, Kaduna, Kano and Lagos airports Sunday June 1. (Domestic Airlines do not fly before 8 AM on Sundays). Officers did not see an airplane fitting the description of the missing 727, but collected the following tail numbers of all 727 aircraft on the ground at that time:

--Abuja Airport: One 727 at the domestic terminal, owned by Nigerian-based Chanchangi Airlines, tail number 5NB-CF. No 727 aircraft at the international terminal.

--Kaduna Airport: No 727 aircraft on tarmac.

--Kano Airport: One 727 located on the shared international and domestic tarmac, owned by Nigerian-based Freedom Air, tail number 5N-BCY. (NOTE: A member of Nigeria's State Security Service (SSS) informed Emboff that the aircraft had not flown in over a year. END NOTE).

--Lagos International and Domestic Airports: One 727 aircraft located at the domestic terminal, owned by IRS Airlines, tail number 5N-RIR . No 727 aircraft at the international terminal.

NIGERIA'S CLOSE COOPERATION

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¶13. (S/NF) On May 27, the DATT contacted the Nigerian Defense Intelligence Agency (NDIA) about the missing aircraft and met with the Chief of Defense Intelligence. The DATT contacted the Directors of Operations and Foreign Liaison, NDIA, and the Military Commander of Lagos International Airport when subsequent reports indicated the aircraft might be in Lagos or Kano. All his contacts had no information that the airplane had landed in Nigeria or entered its airspace.

14. (S/NF) The Ambassador spoke with Rabiu Isyaku Rabiu, Chairman of Nigerian-based IRS Airlines, May 31. Rabiu was aware of plane and mentioned key names. Rabiu said that Aerospace Sales and Leasing of Jacksonville, FL, owned the airplane. Rabiu identified Maury Joseph as the principal owner of Aerospace. Joseph was probably in South Africa and his telephone number was 27-73-315-0565, Rabiu told the Ambassador. AN IRS 727, tail number 5N-AKR, was currently in Johannesburg for maintenance, Rabiu stated. Rabiu recalled that Aerospace had previously tried to sell IRS an aircraft with tail number N880AA but that IRS did not purchase the airplane because it was too old. To disprove his connection with the airplane, Rabiu offered to show us any documentation regarding the prior ownership of aircraft in the IRS fleet.

COMMENT

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15. (S/NF) Post does not think that the missing 727 aircraft could have entered Nigerian airspace and landed at one of four major airports, Port Harcourt International Airport or smaller domestic airports without attracting immediate GON attention. At each of the visited airports, GON officials (SSS, Ministry of Aviation, FAAN and military officers) were aware of the missing airplane; the GON had earlier in the week alerted airport and security officials, to immediately impound the airplane and arrest its crew if it landed at any Nigerian Airport. END COMMENT

JETER